

STATEMENT OF PAUL HOFFMAN, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, FISH AND WILDLIFE AND PARKS, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, UNITED STATES SENATE, CONCERNING S. 1092, TO AUTHORIZE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL DATABASE FOR PURPOSES OF IDENTIFYING, LOCATING, AND CATALOGING THE MANY MEMORIALS AND PERMANENT TRIBUTES TO AMERICA'S VETERANS.

April 27, 2004

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 1092, a bill to authorize the establishment of a national database for purposes of identifying, locating, and cataloging the many memorials and permanent tributes to America's veterans. Although the purpose of the bill is laudable, the Department does not support enactment of this bill.

The National Park Service (NPS) currently maintains an inventory of all the historic and prehistoric structures that are significant in the 387 units of the National Park System. We are required by the National Park Service Organic Act and the National Historic Preservation Act to maintain such an inventory. As of the end of the fiscal year 2003, this inventory contained information on 26,531 structures, of which approximately 3,760 are monuments, memorials, or markers. Most of the 3,760 (about 85 percent) commemorate veterans of the military actions and events of the United States. The majority of these monuments and memorials (about 90 percent) are associated with individuals and actions of the Civil War. Most of the remaining monuments and memorials are associated with the American Revolution and, to a lesser extent, the War of 1812. A few commemorate World War I, World War II, the Spanish-American War, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

While the intent of this inventory is to provide information to park managers to assist in their management of these structures, much of the information in this inventory may be of interest to a wider audience, such as the public. Such information consists of the location, physical description, and brief chronology of events associated with the structure, a statement of its significance, and often an image of the structure. The information on these monuments and memorials is updated on a periodic basis by teams of professional architects and architectural historians usually working out of one of the regional offices of the NPS. If another group was tasked with the establishment of this database, the NPS would be happy to work with them to provide the information we already collect and maintain in our database.

S. 1092 would authorize the establishment of a national war historical database to locate, identify, and catalog permanent statues, structures, or other monuments on public property commemorating the service of any person or persons in the Armed Forces; this database would be maintained by the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, with the information made available to the public. The bill would also require a report within three years assessing the efficacy and desirability of establishing a permanent fund within the Department of the Treasury for the repair, restoration, and maintenance of memorials identified in the database.

The National Park Service manages 387 park units, including 24 national battlefields, battlefield parks, battlefield sites and military parks. The Department is concerned that the added responsibility of maintaining a database of all structures on public property commemorating the service of any person or persons in the Armed Forces could take resources away from

maintaining and protecting existing park units. While the NPS provides technical assistance for cultural resource preservation activities to the public as part of its mission, all cultural resources that receive National Park Service assistance must meet basic National Register of Historic Places criteria regardless of whether such resources are Federally, locally, or privately managed and maintained. In general, commemorative works do not meet such criteria and standards.

In addition, it is our understanding that there is an existing database and it is maintained by the non-profit organization Remembering Veterans Who Earned Their Stripes (RVETS). We applaud RVETS's past and continued efforts in developing and maintaining its database. Should additional financial support be required, we note that there are many Federal agencies and private organizations that provide grants for such related work, but this is not an appropriate mission for the National Park Service at the Department of the Interior.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members might have.